

Tim

O'Connell

Jim O'Connell

1898 - 1983

Jim O'Connell was a distant cousin of mine. He was born in Ahakeera Dunmanway. He was raised on a small farm there, with his parents and 10 siblings. He loved sport, music and reading books. He was very intelligent according to my grandmother. He was a member of the Aultagh volunteers when joined "Tom Barry's" force in preparation for the Kilmicheal Ambush in 1920. He was 22 years old, and the ideal man to guide the Flying Column knowing as he did, every highway and by way of the local terrain the "safe houses" and the "not so safe houses" too.

After the Kilmicheal Ambush, Jim was given the dangerous task of taking charge of the dead bodies and the young fatally wounded Pat Deasy. For the next five days while the British Auxiliaries scoured the country, he was one of the men who secretly found medical and spiritual assistance for his dying comrade. He concealed, and finally buried, the dead volunteers. This surely must have been a daunting task.

Jim was "captured barefoot" on the 4th January 1921, near Loppeen, wearing the coat which still carried on its side pocket the hole made by the bullet that had killed young Pat Deasy. He was taken by Auxiliaries to Dunmanway Workhouse (behind Dunmanway hospital) the British headquarters and was interrogated and beaten unconscious. He could not swallow food for a month. His face and eye injuries were so bad that he lost his hearing and suffered head and nose problems for the rest of his life.

He was taken to Bandon Barracks, Charles Fort Kinsale, Cork Jail, Spike Island and eventually returned to Dunmanway headquarters again. His name was listed in the Black and Tans Diary found at Dunmanway. Lucky for him, the Tans didn't know for sure whether he had been in Kilmichael. Otherwise the chances of survival would have been very slim.

Despite imprisonment and torture, his spirit remained unbroken and as soon as he was released he took up arms again and continued to fight for freedom and independence.

Jim emigrated once the struggle for independence was over. He lived and worked on the railway in both Bermuda and England in the 1930's. He then returned to Ireland, worked in Dublin before finally settling once again in his beloved Dunmanway. He remained a loyal Republican til the end.

Taken from,
The Wild Heather Glen
By Louis Whyte